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Technology and the Impoverishment of Experience: An Insight through Heidegger and Marcuse

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The influence of technology in contemporary society is increasingly pervasive. While humankind reaps the benefits of technology, these benefits do not come without costs. We see these costs manifest themselves in phenomena such as ecological destruction, invasions of privacy through surveillance, and the obsolescence of human labor, to name just a few. However, despite their prevalence in the modern world, these costs often go unaddressed, if not unarticulated.

Technology, from the Industrial Revolution to the Information Age, has reconceived the way in which we orient ourselves in our world. In doing so it has in many cases impoverished human experience. Communications technology deprives us of face-to-face interactions we would have otherwise engaged in, and our instant access to the Internet, with its wide range of amusements, has produced a culture of immediate gratification and superficiality. Modern technology has also established a culture of hyper-efficiency in which laborers are often overworked and taken advantage of, and contemporary weaponry is responsible for the ever-higher amounts of carnage. With these sorts of detriments in mind, amongst many others, how can we make sense of the toll technology takes on human experience?

Philosophers Martin Heidegger and Herbert Marcuse have provided us with especially insightful considerations of the ways in which modern technology impoverishes human existence. Furthermore, they have both posed means by which society might hope to redeem the quality of experience that has been lost in technology's wake. In order to illustrate this impoverishment, I will draw from two particular philosophical works that I find address these matters most powerfully, namely Heidegger's 1949 lecture "The Question Concerning Technology" and Marcuse's 1964 book *One-Dimensional Man*.

Both Heidegger and Marcuse not only provide accounts of the ways in which technology threatens human experience, but they also provide insights that allow us to understand technology in a way that can help us to combat these threats. They both address the pervasiveness of technology's influence in our world and provide alternative ways of seeing our world other than solely through the lens of the technological. Although Heidegger and Marcuse wrote these texts in the mid-twentieth century, the insights they provide remain pertinent in the present.

In what follows, I will first explain the ways in which Heidegger and Marcuse understand technology as threatening human experience. I will then discuss the ways in which they suggest we might counteract these threats before addressing the problems that exist with these suggestions. Finally, I will provide a means by which we might reconcile the problems that arise in these conceptions of redemption from technology's threats.

1 Technology's Threat to Human Experience

There are two common views of technology that Heidegger rejects in "The Question Concerning Technology." These are the instrumental and anthropological views of technology. The instrumental view, or the neutral view, simply conceives of technology as a means to any given end. The anthropological view, on the other hand, understands technology as a human activity. It emphasizes that the use and creation of technology is inherent to human nature. Heidegger argues that these two conceptions of technology are intertwined. Moreover, he suggests that these instrumental and anthropological definitions serve as the foundation for the now prevailing conception of technology. Heidegger sees these conceptions as indisputably correct, and therefore does not reject them on this basis. Rather, he argues that while these views of technology are not wrong, they fail in that they do not address technology's essence. They address how and why we use technology, but they are lacking in that they do not address technology's consequences. Heidegger argues that it is in this sense that the instrumental and anthropological views of technology leave us blind to the dangerous ways in which technology operates. Through his "question concerning technology," Heidegger attempts to show technology's essence and how it threatens experience.

Before we further attend to Heidegger's conception of technology, it is first crucial that we make clear his use of the term "revealing." Heidegger refers to the Greek word *aletheia* in his notion of revealing, or disclosure. In Greek mythology, *aletheia*, translated as "truth" in English, or more literally as un-forgetfulness or un-concealment, reverses the oblivion that comes to those who drink from the River Lethe.[1] Here, Heidegger establishes an analogy between *alethia* and coming to a proper revealing of technology. Just as the River Lethe reverses oblivion, a proper revealing of technology reverses our oblivion to how technology

[1] QCT pg. 36

impoverishes experience. Heidegger refers to this kind of truth revealing as "bringing-forth," which exists in opposition to "challenging-forth."[2] Heidegger compares bringing-forth with the Greek word *poieisis,* which means "to make," especially in the context of art. *Poieisis* serves as the root of our word "poetry." *Physis,* too, is a bringing-forth in which something arises from itself. It is understood as the highest sense of *poeisis*. Heidegger uses the case of a blooming flower as an example of *physis*.[3] However, technology does not reveal the truth through a bringing-forth, whether through *poieisis* or through *physis*. Rather, technology discloses the world through "challenging-forth," or "ordering revealing." Technology is challenging, or ordering in that it "puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such."[4] Technology challenges nature to order itself in a way in which it can be instrumentalized. Challenging-forth is dangerous because it understands the world and its inhabitants as mere resources, a phenomenon Heidegger refers to as *Gestell.*

Gestell, translated as "enframing," is coextensive with modern technology, the primary character of today's being. The enframing is dangerous in that it reveals the world as consisting almost solely of resources. Heidegger asserts, for example, that through enframing forests are seen as mere timber and people as a supply of patients for the healthcare industry.[5] In the twenty-first century, we can make a similar analogy. Earth's metals are understood as raw materials for smartphones and tablet computers, and people are often seen as resources for social "networking." Heidegger refers to the Earth and its inhabitants, understood in this way, as a "standing reserve." When something is transformed into a standing reserve it loses its inherent value and instead its value comes to be defined by its usefulness, by its ability to serve

[2] QCT pg. 16
[3] QCT pg. 10
[4] QCT pg. 14
[5] QCT pg. 18

as a means to an end, rather than as an end in itself. The enframing is able to transform the world into a standing reserve through its subversive power, which is not understood as such. Moreover, technology is assimilative. It assimilates everything, including the criticisms made of it, into itself, into its enframing. Rather than showing its subversive power, enframing offers itself as an accommodation, even as an improvement to human experience.

Technology is not value neutral for Heidegger. Heidegger explicates this point in the following:

> But we are delivered to [technology] in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology.[6]

When technology is conceived as neutral, it is left to function without intervention. Since the enframing has the potential both to convert experience into a standing reserve and to obscure the alternative to itself, it renders technology inherently dangerous.[7]

As a student of Heidegger's, Marcuse was influenced by his mentor's conception of technology. Marcuse's understanding of the relationship between technology's essence and its application is similar to Heidegger's in that technology in itself presents the world merely as a resource, as a means to a end. In other words, for both Heidegger and Marcuse, it is the nature of technology *as such* that gives rise to the instrumentalization of our world. Marcuse refers to this phenomenon as the "technological a priori."

> The science of nature develops under the technological a priori which projects nature as potential instrumentality, stuff of control and organisation. And the apprehension of

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[6] QCT pg. 4

[7] Another threat Heidegger sees in technology is that it conceptually precedes science. In other words, science, in its essence, inherently exists within the enframing. Therefore, seeing that our ultimate aim here is to understand the ways in which we might transcend the enframing, I have chosen not to address this subject in further detail. For a discussion on Heidegger's view of the relationship between technology and science, see QCT, pp. 21-22.

> nature as (hypothetical) instrumentality precedes the development of all particular technical organization.[8]

Furthermore, Marcuse writes that "when technics becomes the universal form of material production, it circumscribes an entire culture; it projects a historical totality—a 'world.'"[9] In other words, the technological a priori exists prior to its particular technological manifestations. It holds nature as this potential "stuff of control and organization" even before tangible, material technology does. To make sense of this, take any consumer product, a can of corporate beer, for example, which requires that nature be thought of as potential "stuff of control and organization." The technological a priori precedes the production of this beer. It comes into play even before we conceive of the particular technologies that allow agribusiness to grow, harvest, ferment, package, and distribute this beer. The technological a priori provides the context that allows us to see nature, to see wheat and barley, as this kind of "stuff" to be controlled and organized, to be grown, harvested, etc.[10]

Marcuse then attempts to distinguish "pure science" from "applied science." Pure science is "science and scientific thought, with [its] internal truth."[11] This kind of science is characterized primarily by scientific theory and mathematics. The laws of physics might be thought of as pure science, for example. Applied science, on the other hand, manifests itself in "the use and application of science in the social reality," i.e. in technology.[12] Marcuse claims that pure science and applied science are separate from one another, and more specifically, that

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[8] ODM pg. 153
[9] ODM pg. 154
[10] While the technological a priori emphasizes Marcuse's Heideggerian understanding of technology as inherently threatening, there is a tension in his account in that he also sees an emancipatory potential in technology that cuts against Marcuse's a priori. This is a Marxist understanding of technology. This will be addressed in the following section.
[11] ODM pg. 154
[12] *Ibid.*

the former "retains its identity and validity apart from its utilization."[13] However, Marcuse also suggests that applied science has instrumentalized pure science, that "science has become in itself technological."[14] He writes, "science, *by virtue of its own method* and concepts, has projected and promoted a universe in which the domination of nature has remained linked to the domination of man."[15] Pure science, "by virtue of its own method," falls under the technological a priori and is similar to Heidegger's enframing. Encompassed in pure science is its predisposition to instrumentalize and dominate nature.

Marcuse claims that art has the potential to create an emancipatory, transcendent moment in the technological world. He suggests that literature and the fine arts can provide an opposition to the "established forms of life," to the forms of life that have been created in technology's wake. He refers to this antagonistic feature of art as "artistic alienation," which I will address in the following section. However, Marcuse also believes that, as with the natural world, technology tends to instrumentalize art, which weakens art's potential oppositional force. For Marcuse, art is inevitably mediated, and ultimately overwhelmed, by the socio-historical world in which it exists, which in our case is the technological world, driven by advertising and consumption[16]: "The absorbent power of society depletes the artistic dimension by assimilating its antagonistic contents."[17] In other words, the advertising and consumer-driven, technological world absorbs and redirects art's attempts to oppose and criticize it.

Accordingly, technology collapses high culture, or the arts, into lower consumer culture. Marcuse defines high culture as that which expresses "a conscious, methodical

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[13] ODM pg. 155
[14] *Ibid.*
[15] ODM pg. 166
[16] ODM pg. 58
[17] ODM pg. 61

alienation from the entire sphere of business and industry, and from its calculable and profitable order."[18] Artistic mediums, such as films, books, and radio, are ideally alienated from the lower culture of consumerism. These mediums theoretically provide an artistic space to critique the society in which they exist. However, the fundamental themes of contemporary films, books, radio, etc. only serve to recapitulate capitalist objects. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno refer to this phenomenon as the "culture industry."[19] They write that mass cultural media such as film and radio, "no longer need to present themselves as art. The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce."[20] The culture industry has diminished the artistic space for social criticism that artistic mediums once had. Through the collapse of high and low culture, art is deprived of a space where it can critique the society in which it finds itself. In this sense, art is converted into yet another resource, in this case, into advertising for the sake of profits.

2 Possibilities for Redemption

Despite their pessimistic accounts of technology, both Heidegger and Marcuse provide ways in which we might change our relationship to technology, and thereby rehabilitate human experience. Heidegger's premise in "The Question Concerning Technology" is that if we can come to a clear understanding of the nature of technology, then we might be able to come to an insight that allows for the world to be revealed in true, non-concealing ways; we might be able to see the world, to have it revealed to us, through bringing-forth rather than challenging-forth.

[18] ODM pg. 58
[19] DOE pg. 94
[20] DOE pg. 95

However, Heidegger contends that simply recognizing the way in which technology reveals itself through enframing is not sufficient to address the question concerning technology. He then provides two extremes in regards to the role of human agency in understanding the enframing. Heidegger writes, "Does [enframing] happen somewhere beyond all human doing? No. But neither does it happen exclusively *in* man, or decisively *through* man."[21] Therefore, on one hand, we have the notion that enframing exists outside the realm of human understanding, of "human doing." This is a deterministic view of technology. On the other hand we have the idea that enframing might occur "exclusively *in* man, or decisively *through* man." In this case, technology is only understood through absolute human agency. Heidegger rejects both of these extremes. Therefore his ultimate account of technology is neither deterministic nor idealistic. He claims that while technology poses some threats that humankind does not have the ability to combat, there are others that we do have the ability to confront.

Heidegger does not suggest that we reject technology entirely. He doesn't call for any reversion to pre-technological ways of life, to living off the land or hunting and gathering, for example. Rather Heidegger suggests that we attempt to find technology's redeeming qualities at its core, within it, through its "saving power." According to Heidegger, "technology harbors in itself what we least suspect, the possible arising of the saving power," and that the saving power "lets man see and enter into the highest dignity of his essence."[22] As Heidegger puts it, "This dignity lies in keeping watch over the unconcealment—and with it, from the first, the concealment—of all coming to presence on this earth."[23] The saving power preserves the dignity we hold as we witness truth unfold, as we watch these truths as they become

[21] QCT pg. 24
[22] QCT pg. 32
[23] QCT pg. 17

unconcealed. There are two ways, through the saving power, that we can maintain our dignity as we do so. These manifest themselves through the essence of technology and through art. Through the essence of technology "[w]e look into the danger and see the growth of the saving power."[24] Heidegger suggests that we find the saving power "here and now in the little things"[25] while simultaneously keeping the danger of technology in mind.

Here it should be noted that Heidegger's only indication of the meaning of the "saving power" in "The Question Concerning Technology" is in a reference to the opening lines of the poem "Patmos" by Friedrich Hölderlin. Heidegger writes "Thus, where Enframing reigns, there is *danger* in the highest sense." He follows with this quote from "Patmos": "But where danger is, grows / The saving power also." While Heidegger says that the saving power is both found within technology and preserves our dignity, he doesn't explicitly define it. More importantly, he does not make clear how the saving power enables a bringing-forth revealing, and therefore leaves it unclear as to what the relationship is between this so-called saving power and the ability for humanity to rehabilitate experience. I will use the term "saving power" as Heidegger does, i.e. to refer to some force that both exists within technology and preserves human dignity in keeping watch over concealment and unconcealment.

Heidegger points towards an ambiguity in the essence of technology, in the enframing. On the one hand, enframing manifests itself in the sense we have discussed so far; it challenges forth in a manner of ordering and calculating. On the other hand, the enframing simultaneously presents humanity with the notion that we hold the potential to reveal the truth about technology through bringing-forth. Through the saving power Heidegger insinuates that we do, in part, have the ability to combat the threats of technology. Heidegger would argue that since

[24] QCT pg. 32
[25] QCT pg. 33

the saving power preserves our dignity in watching the concealment and unconcealment of truth unfold, it can therefore provide us with insight into how we might combat technology's threats. However, Heidegger's definition of the saving power is also insufficient in that it does not include what such an insight might entail.

But merely acknowledging the existence of the saving power is not enough to save experience from the impoverishment technology has pressed upon it. While we are not capable of directly combating the threats of the enframing, Heidegger suggests that we do have the ability to promote the bringing-forth revealing of technology through the arts. In order to make this argument, Heidegger makes use of the Greek term *technē.* As indicated earlier, *technē* was the proper way of revealing in Ancient Greece; it brought forth the truth rather than challenging it forth. Heidegger asserts that *technē* encompassed not only the "activities and skills of the craftsman," but also the "arts of the mind and the fine arts."[26] Thus, *technē* was a positive term. It served as a particular means of seeing the natural world through a lens other than that which sees it as a mere supply of resources. Heidegger emphasizes that in Ancient Greece, art did not have a distinct name, but rather was also referred to under the term *technē*. Therefore, through *technē,* the most distinct material accomplishments of a society, via its craftsmen, simultaneously served as a society's most accomplished art. Here we might think of the Parthenon or the Colosseum. These magnificent structures were celebrated for both their material and artistic grandeur.

However, Heidegger contends that *technē*, understood in this way, no longer holds in the modern world. He writes:

[26] QCT pg. 13

> One can object that [*technē*] indeed holds for Greek thought and that at best it might apply to the techniques of the handcraftsman, but that it simply does not fit modern machine-powered technology. And it is precisely the latter and it alone that is the disturbing thing, that moves us to ask the question concerning technology per se.[27]

Prior to "modern machine-powered technology" *technē* encompassed both technology and the fine arts. However, in the wake of modern technology art has fallen out of *technē*, and thus *technē* and technology have become synonymous in present times.[28] Since *technē* is now understood as both "modern machine-powered technology" and "the disturbing thing, that moves us to ask the question concerning technology" it no longer has the potential to provide a proper revealing of the truth about technology, for a bringing-forth of this truth. Therefore, in modern times, art is the only remaining emancipatory kernel of *technē* as it was understood in Ancient Greece. For this reason, Heidegger relies on art to provide us with a proper insight into technology, and therefore also to present us with a means by which we can begin to restore human experience.

Similarly, Marcuse holds that humankind might be able to redeem experience from within that which impoverishes it. Towards the end of *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse draws from Aristotle, arguing that if technology's "final cause," or purpose, were to come to fruition, then technology "would open a universe of qualitatively different relations between man and man, and man and nature."[29] Marcuse refers to this phenomenon as "pacified existence," or the "*end* of technology."[30] He writes that, "'Pacification of existence' does not suggest an accumulation of power but rather the opposite. Peace and power, freedom and

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[27] QCT pp. 13-14
[28] QCT pg. 34
[29] ODM pg. 235
[30] *Ibid.*

power..."[31] It "alters the relation between technology and its primary object, Nature."[32] Marcuse therefore argues that this pacification of existence—this harmony of peace, freedom, and power—is the "repressed final cause"[33] of technology; it is its repressed ultimate end. But what is it then that represses technology's ultimate end of a pacified existence? Marcuse argues that it is capitalist, consumer society that is responsible for this repression.

As Marcuse acknowledges, this is a Marxist understanding of technology.[34] However, this creates a conflict within Marcuse's account of technology. On one hand, Marcuse's technological a priori holds that it is technology *as such* that impoverishes human experience. On the other hand, this Marxist conception of technology provides that it is not technology *as such* that oppresses human experience, but rather that it is technology under the reign of capitalist objectives that does so. Marcuse does not reconcile this conflict. Through this Marxist lens, we see consumer society as that which ultimately impoverishes human experience, rather than technology. Since it is capitalism's reign over technology that impoverishes experience, there remains a conceptual space for an alternative to consumer society in which technology enriches rather than impoverishes human experience.

Furthermore, this internal conflict within *One-Dimensional Man* also creates an external conflict between Marcuse's and Heidegger's accounts of technology more generally. Marx's understanding of technology is much more sympathetic towards technology than Heidegger's conception is. Marx's account allows for the possibility that technology can

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[31] *Ibid.*
[32] ODM pg. 236
[33] ODM pg. 235
[34] It should be noted that Marcuse isn't a full-blown Marxist. Marcuse warns against the fetishization of technology, of the belief that technology has the potential to unproblematically replace human labor. This "fetishism," he claims, "has recently been exhibited mainly among Marxist critics of contemporary industrial society—ideas of the future omnipotence of technological man..." (ODM pg. 235)

manifest itself in something other than the threatening ways it has under capitalism. Marcuse's technological a priori reflects a Heideggerian understanding of technology. Through both Marcuse's technological a priori and Heidegger's enframing, technology, *in its essence*, is understood as a threat to human experience. Under the technological a priori, "the apprehension of nature as (hypothetical) instrumentality *precedes* the development of all particular technical organization." According to both the technological a priori and Heidegger, technology cannot be not empirically informed. However, Marcuse strays from Heidegger's understanding of technology when he incorporates the notion of a "specific historical subject" into his technological a priori. If the technological a priori inherently exists outside of and prior to experience, then how can it include an empirically informed specific historical subject? While attempts to reconcile these ambiguities exist outside the realm of the subject at hand, these tensions are important to acknowledge.

Like Heidegger, Marcuse also resorts to art as a means of potential emancipation from the threats of technology. He argues that inherent in art is a feature that preserves the emancipatory facets of culture that act in opposition to those conventional facets that suppress it. He refers to this feature as *artistic alienation*, or more specifically as "traditional images" of artistic alienation. Marcuse writes:

> What [images of artistic alienation] recall and preserve in memory pertains to the future: images of gratification that would dissolve the society which suppresses it.[35]

Marcuse claims that these images are "in aesthetic incompatibility with the developing society," and furthermore, that "This incompatibility is the token of their truth."[36]

[35] ODM pg. 60

At the end of *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse proposes a final means by which society might emancipate itself from technology's threats, from that which impoverishes experience. Here, Marcuse refers to "the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable."[37] He argues that such outcasts have an inherent, urgent need to bring an end to their existing conditions, and therefore are more likely than others to act on doing so. Furthermore, he argues that their "opposition" to these conditions cannot become absorbed by the technological system that perpetuates them. Marcuse argues that this is because outcasts necessarily exist outside the institutions that oppress them. He writes:

> Their opposition hits the system from without and is therefore not deflected by the system; it is an elementary force which violates the rules of the game and, in doing so, reveals it as a rigged game.[38]

While outcasts are inevitably affected by having been rejected from their society, they are arguably the least influenced by the society that has rejected them. The burden societal outcasts bear both allows them to see society more clearly and simultaneously provides them with pressing reasons to act in opposition to it. As Adorno puts it, "The splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass."[39]

3 Concerns on the Emancipatory Potential of Technology and Art

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[36] *Ibid.*
[37] ODM pg. 256
[38] ODM pp. 256-7
[39] *Minima Moralia* pg. 50

While both Heidegger and Marcuse provide us with a number of ways in which we might save human experience from the threats of technology, neither of their accounts ultimately prove sufficient. At this point it is helpful to imagine a spectrum on which Heidegger exists at one of its extremes and Marx exists at the other. On Heidegger's end we have an understanding of technology in which technology in itself is inherently dangerous. On the other end of this continuum we have orthodox Marxism's technological "fetishism," as Marcuse would have it. At this end of the spectrum technology is understood as an emancipatory force within capitalism in an unproblematic way. According to this view, technology will allegedly bring an end to capitalism and its inherently destructive dynamics, and usher in a future in which humans are virtually omnipotent.

While Marcuse's conception of technology falls somewhere between these two extremes, it doesn't fall there gracefully. There is an ambiguity in Marcuse's notion of technology that affects our understanding of technology, and that consequently has an impact on the ways in which we might combat technology's threats to human experience. On one hand, this ambiguity manifests itself in Marcuse's use of the term "specific historical Subject." This term reflects Marx's understanding of technology in that it historicizes technology's threats. It implies that in a different place and time technology might not threaten human experience. On the other hand we have Marcuse's "technological a priori," which suggests a more Heideggerian conception of technology.

In regards to a "specific historical Subject," Marcuse writes that it is technology's "neutral character which relates objectivity to a specific historical Subject—namely to the consciousness that prevails in the society by which and for which this neutrality is

established."[40] Our "specific historical Subject" has been that of consumer-driven capitalism. However, the implication of the use of the term "specific historical Subject" is that our current, particular Subject is only one of many potential specific historical Subjects. As addressed previously, we can conceive of technology as existing under some specific historical Subject other than our current one, other than consumer-oriented capitalism. In other words, it isn't technology in itself that threatens to impoverish human experience, but rather only technology under the reign of dangerous specific historical Subjects, e.g. contemporary capitalism. In this sense Marcuse's notion of technology via the specific historical Subject reflects Marx's conception of technology, i.e. that it isn't technology *itself* that is dangerous, but rather technology as manifested in a capitalist socio-economic world.

However, Marcuse does criticize Marxist ideology for its technological "fetishism," and for this reason refrains from resorting fully to this extreme. Moreover, while Marcuse's insight on technology is ambivalent, it appears that his ideas tend to align more often with Heidegger's than with Marx's, as is evident in Marcuse's emphasis on the "technological a priori."

The technological a priori is inherent in Marcuse's account of technology just as the enframing is inherent in Heidegger's account. Both enframing and the technological a priori present nature as consisting entirely of resources. Recall that Marcuse describes the technological a priori as that "which projects nature as potential instrumentality, stuff of control and organisation."[41] But is it the technological a priori or our specific historical Subject, *viz.* capitalism, which projects nature in this way? Isn't it capitalism that requires us to see nature as a standing reserve, as the stuff of control and organization so that it may be sold and consumed? If it is the enframing or the technological a priori rather than the specific historical

[40] ODM pg. 156
[41] ODM pg. 153

Subject of capitalism that presents nature in this way, then the technological a priori precedes the specific historical Subject. If this is the case, while there may be specific historical Subjects other than capitalism, there could be none that project nature as anything other than this "stuff of control and organization." Therefore both Heidegger's account of technology and Marcuse's more Heideggerian tendencies are deeply troubling in that they do not provide a space for less threatening specific historical Subjects, at least not in the context of the instrumentalization of nature. Moreover, if we assume that, as Heidegger and in part Marcuse do, that technology's tendency to impoverish experience through instrumentalization is inherent to technology itself, then how can it provide a space in which any sort of emancipatory power can exist?

Marcuse's attempt to distinguish pure science from applied science further demonstrates this ambiguity. As mentioned previously, Marcuse writes that pure science has been instrumentalized by applied science, or technology, and therefore "*by virtue of its own method* and concepts, has projected and promoted a universe in which the domination of nature has remained linked to the domination of man."[42] Therefore "the use and application of science in the social reality" manifests itself, again, in the instrumentalization of nature. However, just as in the cases of the enframing and the technological a priori, Marcuse neglects the specific historical Subject. Is it applied science that projects "a universe in which the domination of nature has remained linked to the domination of man," or is it "the use and application of science in the social reality," in our case, the specific social reality of contemporary capitalism?

Furthermore, another ambiguity arises for both Heidegger and Marcuse in their understandings of art. Heidegger and Marcuse share the idea that art serves as a prospective means of liberation. However, they both acknowledge that art is inevitably mediated by the

[42] ODM pg. 166

socio-historical subject that it hypothetically holds the power to critique. While both Heidegger and Marcuse recognize that art is mediated by its societal context, only Marcuse seems to recognize the paradox that exists in this understanding. Heidegger, on the other hand, not only fails to recognize this paradox, but he goes so far as to idealize it. He writes that in his ideal society, in Ancient Greece:

> The arts were not derived from the artistic. Art works were not enjoyed aesthetically. Art was not a sector of cultural activity.[43]

For Heidegger it was ideal that the arts were inherent to greater Greek society; it was ideal that there was no need for a separate cultural sector designated for the arts. Just as art was inherent to Greek society, Heidegger argues that art, the so-called "saving power," is also inherent to modern machine-powered technology, that "technology harbors in itself what we least suspect, the possible arising of the saving power."[44] But, if art exists ideally "not as a sector of cultural activity," but rather as inherent to the society in which it finds itself, then why should we trust art considering it currently exists under the objectives of modern machine-powered society? As long as art is mediated by modern technology, we should not fully depend on it to emancipate us from technology's threats.

It is also worth noting that the role of the craftsman is more contentious when considered in regards to consumer-powered capitalism rather than in Ancient Greece. Is the ideal craftsman a vendor at a local flea market? Is she an architectural consultant? Is he Steve Jobs? Moreover, would Heidegger regard each of these people as playing equal roles in both

[43] QCT pg. 34
[44] QCT pg. 32

the "arts of the mind and the fine arts" and "the activities and skills of the craftsman," i.e. in both art and technology? It is possible that the two might exist on a continuum with art at one extreme and technology at the other. All forms of art and technology might fall somewhere on this spectrum. It might also be possible that there is a drastic schism between the arts and the skills of the craftsman. However, Heidegger does not provide sufficient criteria for distinguishing between the arts and the skills of the craftsman.

Like Heidegger, Marcuse posits that "Like technology, art creates another universe of thought and practice against and within the existing one."[45] However, Marcuse is not as optimistic as Heidegger is about art's potential to redeem experience from technology. In other words, Marcuse argues that since art is inevitably mediated by the world in which it arises, its power to serve as "the protest against that which is" [46] becomes diminished. Here, although it might be despairing for us, I believe Marcuse is right. If we are to call on art as the "protest against that which is," we need to recognize that art inevitably arises from its given socio-historical environment. Therefore, unlike Heidegger, Marcuse rightly recognizes that art's origins cannot be fully trusted.

4 Reconciling these Problems

Marcuse concludes *One-Dimensional Man* with the recognition of the emancipatory potential that exists amongst societal outcasts. He writes, "The fact that [outcasts] start refusing to play the game may be the fact which marks the beginning of the end of a period."[47]

[45] ODM pg. 233
[46] ODM pg. 63
[47] ODM pg. 257

However, while he acknowledges this possibility, he does not fetishize it. Marcuse continues, admitting, "Nothing indicates that it will be a good end."[48] He then emphasizes the role chance plays in the unfolding of "the beginning of the end of a period." There is a risk in the attempt to bring an end to the society in which we currently exist. On one hand, there is the possibility that if societal outcasts start refusing to play the game, then our flawed yet ordered society might relapse into chaos and barbarism. On the other hand, there is the hope that as the opposition comes face-to-face with the status quo, our now one-dimensional society will be severed into multiple dimensions. In this case, the technological world would no longer have the power to absorb its opposition. Marcuse writes, "[T]he chance is that, in this period, the historical extremes may meet again: the most advanced consciousness of humanity, and its most exploited force. It is nothing but a chance."[49] The meeting of these extremes would break open the one-dimensionality of society.

But how does this "chance" manifest itself in society over fifty years after *One-Dimensional Man* was published? Should outcasts risk a potential relapse into barbarism in hope of restoring a multi-dimensional society? If this is the case, then how might they go about doing this?

Marcuse defends outsiders who dedicate themselves to the Great Refusal, to the demand for a new and liberated society. He writes, "The critical theory of society...wants to remain loyal to those who, without hope, have given and give their life to the Great Refusal."[50] However, Marcuse leaves us with a strange ambiguity. He claims of societal outsiders that,

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[48] *Ibid.*
[49] *Ibid.*
[50] *Ibid.*

"their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not."[51] Marcuse moves past this argument too quickly with little preface and no following explication. If the consciousness of these "outsiders" is not revolutionary, then what is it that makes them so-called outsiders? Here there is a distinction to be made between the material conditions of societal outcasts and the conditions of their consciousness. The people Marcuse describes as outcasts are materially deprived compared to the rest of society. They lack the material means to live comfortably on a day-to-day basis, and this sets them apart from other people. With sufficient material deprivation it is often possible for people to become aware of their subordination within society. However, while this deprivation is a necessary condition in establishing a social revolution, it is not a sufficient one. In order to create a true revolution, the consciousness of those in revolt must exist outside the status quo; it cannot recapitulate capitalist norms as Marcuse insinuates it might. Therefore there is a conceptual gap between the "opposition" of the materially deprived and the un-oppositional nature of their consciousness. We cannot know what fills this gap; we cannot know what transitional factors come into play in the progression from material deprivation to revolutionary consciousness. As a result, Marcuse takes a gamble by relying on the materially deprived to lead a revolt. Ideally their "opposition" would lead to an enlightened consciousness, but there is no way to guarantee that this would be the case.

However, with Marcuse as its spearhead, the rising of the New Left in the sixties proved that the transition from material deprivation to a truly oppositional consciousness *can* occur. The focus of the New Left was to capacitate the oppressed, and in doing so, to act in direct opposition to the capitalist status quo that established this oppression in the first place. In this sense the sixties serve as evidence that while the "opposition" of societal outcasts does not

[51] ODM pg. 256

necessarily pave the way to restore multi-dimensional society, it certainly holds the potential to do so.

In the present day, there are a number of ways that people can and do commit themselves to restoring a multi-dimensional society. As the Information Age progresses it appears that societal outcasts are finding new means of expression through information communication technology, or ICT. Through social media outlets, which are often free-of-charge and require a computer reservation at a public library at most, outsiders can now share information and art with a greater number of people than they could before the Digital Age. Furthermore, doing so does no longer requires a college education, a newspaper publication, or an art exhibition. Outcasts no longer need to depend on the system that rejects them in order to share their ideas as widely as they now can. ICT equips outcasts with a vast, potentially oppositional space which allows their voices to be heard more widely and quickly than ever before. The decentralized technologies of ICT have opened the possibility for outcasts to better organize themselves in their stand against established society. In the Digital Age, sharing art and information only requires passion and an interest in doing so.

However, redeeming human experience from the threats of technology is an ambitious task to pin on societal outcasts alone. Here chance comes into play once again. For one, it might be the case that as outcasts enter into the dialogue that takes place via ICT, they also enter into the system they hoped to oppose, and that by doing so, they lose their status as "outsiders." In this case the one-dimensionality of our society would remain intact and unobstructed. Again, there is also the possibility that outcasts might employ ICT to incite violence on a slippery slope towards fascism or barbarism. The Islamic state, for example, is notorious for inciting violence through their pervasive social media presence. However, there

are simultaneously an incalculable number of positive oppositional social movements that have been enabled by ICT. Movements like Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring, and Black Lives Matter are often noted, in part, for their origins in ICT.

Therefore while *One-Dimensional Man* is sometimes understood as a pessimistic account of the potential for true revolution to take place, this is not the case. As people insistently demand social change, they take the aforementioned chances, but by no means are they destined to failure. With that being said, we cannot forget the consequences of mislead social oppositions. Ultimately, any hope in redeeming experience from technology's threats manifests itself in the answer to the question, "Is it worth the risk?" This is a question that can only be answered in time. As Marcuse reminds us, there are no ways to bridge the gap between the present and its future. In this gap, oppositional forces are left solely to chance, ultimately destined either to success or to failure.

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